

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe

June 12, 2009

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome Prime Minister Tsvangirai to the Oval Office. He and his delegation have been meeting with my team throughout the day. I, obviously, have extraordinary admiration for the courage and the tenacity that the Prime Minister has shown in navigating through some very difficult political times in Zimbabwe.

There was a time when Zimbabwe was the bread basket of Africa and continues to have enormous potential. It has gone through a very dark and difficult period politically. The President—President Mugabe, I think I've made my views clear, has not acted oftentimes in the best interest of the Zimbabwean people and has been resistant to the kinds of democratic changes that need to take place.

We now have a power-sharing agreement that shows promise, and we want to do everything we can to encourage the kinds of improvement not only on human rights and rule of law, freedom of the press, and democracy that is so necessary, but also on the economic front. The people of Zimbabwe need very concrete things: schools that are reopened; a health care delivery system that can deal with issues like cholera or HIV/AIDS; an agricultural system that is able to feed its people. And on all these fronts, I think the Prime Minister is committed to significant concrete improvement in the day-to-day lives of the people of Zimbabwe.

I congratulate him; they've been able to bring inflation under control after hyperinflation that was really tearing at the fabric of the economy. We're starting to see, slowly, some improvements in capacity—industrial capacity there. So, overall, in a very difficult circumstance, we've seen progress from the Prime Minister.

We are grateful to him. We want to encourage him to continue to make progress. The United States is a friend to the people of Zimbabwe. I've committed \$73 million in assistance to Zimbabwe. It will not be going through the Government directly because we continue to be concerned about consolidating democracy, human rights, and rule of law, but it will be going directly to the people in Zimbabwe, and I think can be of assistance to the Prime Minister in his efforts. He's going to continue to provide us with direction in ways that he thinks we can be helpful. And I'm grateful to him for his leadership, for his courage, and I'm looking forward to being a partner with him in the years to come.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Tsvangirai. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for receiving us. I'm sure that—I want to take the opportunity of congratulating you, although belatedly, for being elected the President. And I think it's a profound experience for some of us who are committed to change, and hopefully that—the Prime Minister, who is committed to change, and the President, who is committed to change, find common convergence in position.

I've been explaining to the President that Zimbabwe is coming out of a political conflict and economic collapse or decay, and that the new political dispensation we have crafted is an attempt to arrest this decay. But also mindful of the fact that it is a journey; this is a transitional

arrangement. We want to institute those reforms that will ensure that in 18 months' time the people of Zimbabwe are given an opportunity to elect their own Government.

Yes, there have been a lot of progress, or progress made by the transitional Government, but there are also problems. It is the problems of implementation, and I do recognize that even by the standard of our own benchmarks, there are gaps that still exist and that we will strive. And I want to show my—to express my commitment that we will strive to implement those benchmarks, not because they are for the international community, but because for ourselves it gives people of Zimbabwe freedom and opportunity to grow.

I want to say, lastly—I want to thank you for that demonstrable leadership in assisting the people of Zimbabwe, and I want to take the opportunity to thank the humanitarian support that the West—we have experienced over the years and the continued expression of support. And of course, we continue to engage in ensuring that that support consolidates the process towards democratic change rather than strengthens a reverse in defense of the status quo.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Obama. Thank you so much. Thank you, everybody. Have a great weekend.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:04 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Zimbabwe, Prime Minister Tsvangirai.

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